

5. DOES THE GANGES SHARK *GLYPHIS GANGETICUS* STRAY TO SRI LANKA?REX I. DE SILVA¹¹31 Dampe, Madapatha 10306, Sri Lanka. Email: caranx@sltnet.lk

Natural history journalist Malaka Rodrigo photographed some sharks at Negombo fish market on March 23, 2011. One of his images shows the anterior part of an 'unusual' shark, which I suspect could be the Ganges Shark *Glyphis gangeticus* (Fig. 1). As the photograph was insufficient in itself to positively identify the species, I forwarded the image to the Shark Research Institute and enquired if the fish could be a Ganges Shark. Dr. L.J.V. Compagno, one of the World's leading authorities on sharks, responded "Possible, but it is necessary to check out the dentition and the dorsal fin proportions to confirm it". He further stated that it could also be one of the four other (named) species.

The shark is brownish dorsally, shading to grey laterally and whitish ventrally. The third, fourth and fifth gill slits are above the pectoral fin base (something common to a few other sharks as well). The snout is short and the eye is minute. The minute eye of this specimen is most likely a degenerate feature in a species, which probably spends most of its time in turbid waters, where sight is of limited value. The minute eye and what is visible of the teeth on the lower jaw are consistent with the Ganges Shark. The known range of the Ganges Shark is the Ganges and Hooghly river systems, and the turbid coastal waters along the east and west coasts of peninsular India down to about 9° 45' N. If the shark photographed in Negombo is a Ganges Shark (and this is not certain) it is probably a stray carried south of its normal range by ocean currents. The Ganges Shark has a reputation for being a ferocious man-eater (Coppleson 1962), although most attacks attributed to it are probably the result of confusion with the Bull Shark *Carcharhinus leucas*, a notorious man-eater, which also occurs in the Ganges and Hooghly river systems



Fig. 1: Shark photographed in Negombo by Malaka Rodrigo

(Compagno 1984).

It is necessary to emphasize that the actual identity of the shark is uncertain at present. However, this may be a 'wake-up' call for ichthyologists to be on the alert for the Ganges Shark in Sri Lankan waters. If, and when, a specimen becomes available it will be useful to check out the dentition and proportions of the dorsal fin. Photographs showing a lateral view of the entire shark will be helpful. Ideally any specimen should be preserved for study.

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